

January 2012 Edition

Definition of Literacy

In the *Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening* (2011), the Pennsylvania State Code defines literacy as follows:

The language arts--Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening — are unique because they are processes that students use to learn and make sense of their world. Students do not read “reading;” they read about history, science, mathematics and other content areas as well as topics that interest and entertain them. Similarly, students do not write “writing;” they use written words to express their knowledge and ideas and to inform or entertain others. Because of the unique nature of the language arts, all teachers in a school use Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening...[to] assist their students in learning them through multiple classroom situations in all the subject areas. (§ 4.83)

Although many dictionaries define literacy as the ability to read and write, the definition of literacy has evolved and expanded over the past several decades. In the 21st century, literacy includes the ability to locate, evaluate, use, and communicate through a wide range of resources including text, visual, audio, and video sources. In other words, literate individuals demonstrate independence; build strong content knowledge; respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline; comprehend as well as critique; value evidence; use technology and digital media strategically and capably; and come to understand other perspectives and cultures (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). To develop individuals with such 21st century literacies requires instruction that is integrated and helps students understand how to access, evaluate, synthesize, and contribute to information (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2007). To ensure academic success, such instruction must occur in the context of all academic disciplines and is the responsibility of all teachers.

Pennsylvania Framework for Literacy

Pennsylvania has a history of commitment to quality literacy instruction. The Pennsylvania Literacy Framework (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2000) was the third in a series of documents that has guided literacy instruction since 1979. These initial documents describe a model of literacy that indicates its multi-faceted nature as meaning-making, social, language-based, and human or personal. The PaCLP provides an update to those previous documents, building on the research evidence in the field.

Standards in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania sets high expectations to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in a competitive global environment. Standards describe what students should know and be able to do from early childhood through high school. The PDE convened stakeholders to

develop content and process standards in fourteen different subject areas. The Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening (2011) are divided into three separate levels: Pre-K – Grade 3, Elementary (Grades 3 – 8), and Secondary (Grades 8 – 12). In addition to the PA Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Pennsylvania has also adopted the Common Core State Standards that are aligned closely with the current academic standards.

These standards are designed to meet the needs of all students and serve as the foundation for this comprehensive literacy plan. The Standards that guide literacy instruction in Pennsylvania are briefly described below.

Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening (Birth – Grade 12)

The Learning Standards for Early Childhood are designed to address the needs of young children. They are divided into Infant-Toddler, Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten. The Learning Standards for Early Childhood were revised in 2009 to ensure that they are more consistent, better aligned across ages, and better connected to the academic standards. The PDE Learning Standards for Early Childhood include clearly sequenced skills from infancy through kindergarten, an emphasis on the process of learning, a greater infusion of active learning strategies, and recognition of the impact of culture and diversity on learning.

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Grades PreK through 12 indicate what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level in the areas of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The standards provide the targets for instruction and student learning essential for success in all academic areas, not just language arts. All teachers are expected to use the standards as they define the skills and strategies employed by effective readers and writers. The standards provide clear expectations in the following areas:

- Reading independently
- Reading, analyzing and interpreting text
- Reading, analyzing and interpreting literature-fiction and non-fiction
- Types and quality of writing
- Speaking and listening
- Research
- Characteristics and functions of the English language
- Information, communication and literacy technology

Common Core State Standards

Pennsylvania has adopted the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are closely aligned with the existing PA Academic standards. The CCSS requires a greater emphasis on informational text, text complexity, digital literacy, discussion and argumentation. The PDE has developed a “transition” plan to assist schools in the implementation of the CCSS and to make any needed curricular changes.

Pennsylvania’s Standards Aligned System

In order to more fully describe the elements within an educational system that are necessary for high levels of student achievement, Pennsylvania developed an online resource: the Standards Aligned System (SAS). The SAS website provides resources for understanding and for implementing six critical components of the educational system. The intentional interaction of the articulated components increases the likelihood of student success. The elements include:

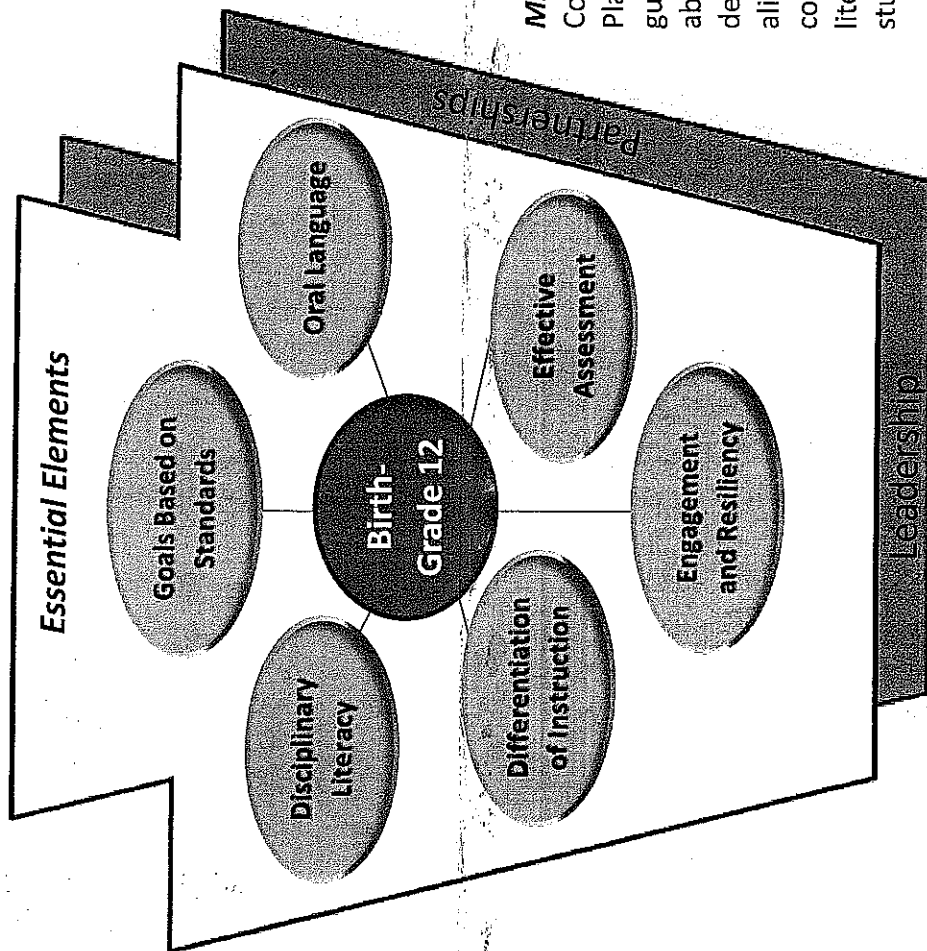
- Curriculum Framework
- Clear Standards
- Fair Assessments
- Instruction
- Interventions
- Materials and Resources

Overview of Plan

In Part II, the Guiding Principles that represent the beliefs and assumptions underlying the PaCLP are described. In Part III, the Essential Elements that provide the building blocks for the PaCLP are identified and explained. Each of the Essential Elements includes a definition and rationale for its inclusion, implications for instruction, and a list of resources for educators. As this dynamic plan continues to be developed, specific examples of cases, videos, and audio material will be provided to assist educators in their instructional efforts. In Part IV, specific information about the resources, policies, and documents available to constituents is provided, as is a set of recommendations for implementing the PaCLP. In that section, an action plan for implementation is also described.

The graphic on the next page illustrates the relationship of the Guiding Principles to the Essential Elements. The Guiding Principles serve as the foundation or base of the Pennsylvania Plan and support the Essential Elements of a comprehensive literacy plan (Birth-Grade 12). Keystones to fulfilling the state’s literacy vision and mission require both strong leadership and partnerships.

Pennsylvania Comprehensive Literacy Plan: Keystones to Opportunity



Vision. All students in Pennsylvania from birth through Grade 12 will become well-educated citizens with a command of literacy that prepares them for the challenges of the 21st century and enables them to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Mission. The Pennsylvania Comprehensive Literacy Plan (PaCLP) will provide guidance to stakeholders about their roles in developing an integrated, aligned, and comprehensive set of literacy experiences for students.

Guiding Principles that support the PaCLP

Literacy is the foundation for all learning	Multiple perspectives: linguistic, cultural and personal
High expectations for all learners	Evidence-based decision making
	21st Century teaching

Part II: Guiding Principles

The five guiding principles described below represent the beliefs and assumptions underlying the PaCLP.

Five Guiding Principles

1	Literacy is a critical foundation for all learning and serves as a “keystone” for opportunity and success. The Standards for literacy must promote high level learning for all students to ensure that they are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21 st century. Because literacy is an important skill in itself and serves as a tool for learning, it is an essential at all levels (Birth-Grades 12). Moreover, to enhance literacy learning of students, there must be shared responsibility of educators, parents and caretakers, and the broader community.
2	Student learning, motivation, and access to educational opportunities are increased when linguistic, cultural, and personal experiences are valued, understood, represented in the curriculum and classroom practice, and used to help students make connections between what they know and what they are learning. Multiple perspectives and experiences provide opportunities for students to learn about their own as well as the culture of others.
3	There must be high expectations for all learners and a belief that all are capable of gaining literacy skills that enable them to be successful as adults. Instruction must address the full range of learners, must be differentiated to meet each child’s needs, and requires a well-integrated system connecting general, compensatory, gifted, and special education.
4	Evidence-based decision-making must be at the heart of all instructional decisions related to literacy development.
5	Educators must be prepared to teach effectively in the schools of the 21 st century and be provided with continuing professional development support that enables them to be lifelong learners.